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## Church of God: Historical Landmark of Camp Hill

John Winthrop hoped his Massachusetts Bay colony would be a “city upon a hill.”

Likewise, the small Borough of Camp Hill has an infamous “church upon a hill”, namely the Church of God. Truly, this building is significant in the history of Camp Hill because it is Camp Hill’s very first church and religious institution.

In order to understand the rudimentary history of the Church of God, it is necessary to discuss its founder and the events surrounding his life that led up to his establishing the denomination. John Winebrenner was an energetic and fervent German Reformed Church pastor who founded the Church of God denomination. Winebrenner was originally located at the historic Peace Church west of Camp Hill where he preached. He had a following within the Reformed Church because of his preaching and broke off from his Church to establish the Church of God because he did not agree with their doctrine. Established in 1825 first in Harrisburg, eight years later in 1833 the Church of God was founded at Camp Hill. Beginning as a meeting at the house of a man named Mr. Warner, the supporters of Winebrenner and offshoots from the Peace Church established the Church of God in Camp Hill. Indeed, the name Camp Hill comes from the camp meetings held by this active group of worshipers annually. Land was purchased on the hill and the Bethel, or house of God, was erected as a place to worship. In 1924, an annex was added to Bethel. It faced remodels in 1938 and 1962 and then proceeded to add an education center in 1973. As an interesting fact, the old chandelier of the Capitol Building in Harrisburg hangs in the sanctuary from the time the old Capitol burnt down because the pastor of the Church who worked at the state at the time of the Capitol’s demise obtained it.

The denomination of the Church of God has an evangelical born again Christian theology. They affirm the Reformation in the priesthood of all believers and the primacy of the

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Word of God. Three Ordinances, or sacraments, are used in the Church of God which point towards the grace of God: Communion, Believer Baptism, and feet washing. The Lord's Supper is consumed 4 to 5 times per year and those who can confess are baptized as a symbol of their conversion. Unique to their denomination, a foot washing is done in conjunction with Communion to demonstrate the work Christ did while on Earth. In addition, they are a pro-life, non-Pentecostal denomination that interprets the Bible both literally and figuratively. Justification is achieved by grace through faith in Christ, not by works. The Churches of God General Conference establishes and maintains these beliefs and has done so without too much alteration since John Winebrenner.

Historically, the Church of God has been involved in several social movements. Among these are the abolitionist movement, temperance crusade, and women's suffrage movement. In addition, they have been and continue to be involved with inter-faith dialogue as part of ecumenical ministeriums. Today, the Church of God is active in its community and congregation. Its vision as a whole is "To become a multi-generational church, in which each generation is dependent upon the others and seen as an essential part of the Body of Christ." It offers traditional and contemporary services, Sunday school for all ages, and Bible study for people of all ages. Children enjoy Wednesday night Pioneer Clubs, Junior & Wee church, and in the summer-Vacation Bible School. Middle and High school youth can join Bible studies, the youth group; go on mission trips, fun outings, movie nights, youth choir, etc. Certainly, their youth group is active and alive, incorporating fun and games as well as structured Bible lessons into their youth nights. Adults engage in the Praise Band, Bible study, Wednesday night prayer, Senior Life Luncheons, small groups, and other projects and social groups. Finally, the Church supports Findlay College, Winebrenner Seminary, and the Church Home in Carlisle.

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Therefore, the small Church of God on a hill in Camp Hill is a testament to the founding of religion in the Borough as its first Church. Later on, the other various denominations would come to inhabit the area. That is why it today has a land marker which denotes its important and prominent position in the history of this small American town.

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